

JOSEPH CONRAD



Almayer's Folly

An Outcast of the
Islands

Tales of Unrest

The Arrow of Gold
and

THE ROVER



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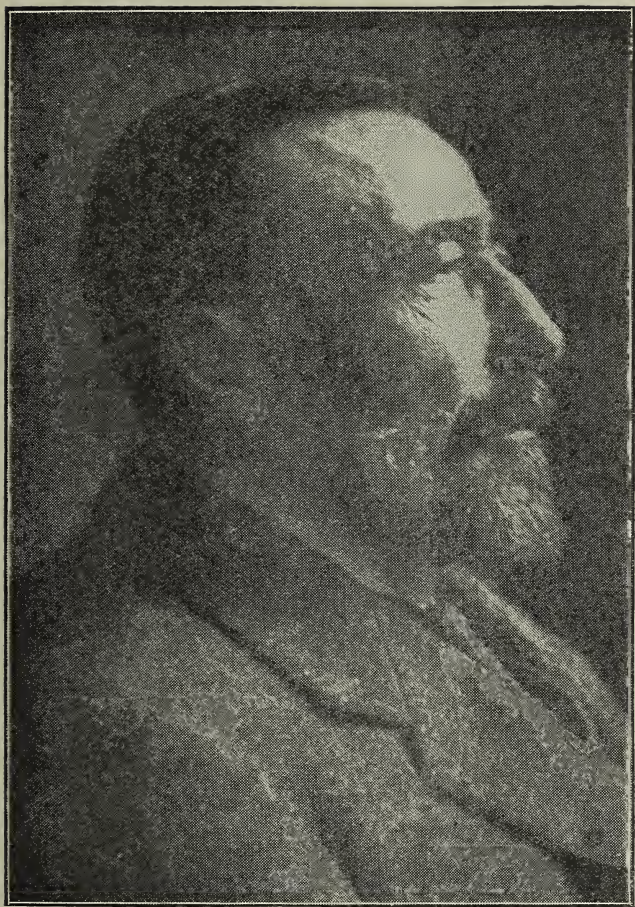
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In this novel Mr. Joseph Conrad has the Mediterranean, as seen from the French south coast, not for a stage, but for a background, in the depth of which the presence of the English blockading fleet is rather felt than seen throughout the course of events which happen on land in a lonely farm-house. The narrative, intimate in character, deals with the crisis in the lives of two women and some men—the Rover being the central figure—and ends at sea in an episode in which the shapes of the blockading ships and the person of Lord Nelson himself are evoked for a moment. The tale, though in no sense historical, attempts to reflect in part at least the spirit of the period 1802-4, with references to an earlier time, after the evacuation of Toulon, when during the savage excesses of the Republican reaction the Heiress of Escampobar, when still almost a child, passed through experiences which had unsettled her mind.



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JOSEPH CONRAD

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JOSEPH CONRAD

A Pen Portrait. By James Huneker.

*Reprinted from "The Country Life Press," by the courtesy of
Messrs. Doubleday, Page & Co.*

HE is not so tall as he seems. He is very restless. He paces an imaginary quarterdeck and occasionally peers through the little windows of his quaint house as if searching the weather. A caged sea lion, I thought. His shrug and play of hands are Gallic, or Polish, as you please, and his eyes, shining or clouded, are not of our race, they are Slavic; even the slightly muffled voice is Slavic. One of the most beautiful languages is the Polish—the French of the Slav tongues as it has been called. When Mr. Conrad speaks English, which he does with rapidity and clearness of enunciation, you can hear, rather overhear, the foreign cadence, the soft slurring of sibilants so characteristic of Polish speech; in a word, he is more foreign looking than I had expected. He speaks French with fluency and purity, and he often lapsed into it during our conversation. Like many another big man, he asked more questions than he answered mine. I underwent the same experience with Walt Whitman at Camden, who was an adept in the gentle art of pumping visitors. In the case of Joseph Conrad his curiosity is prompted by his boundless sympathy for all things human. He is, as you may have surmised by his writings, the most human and lovable of men. He takes an interest in everything except bad art, which moves him to a vibrating indignation, and he is extremely sympathetic when speaking of the work of his contemporaries. What a lesson for the critic with the barbed-wire method would be the remarks of Conrad upon art and artists! Naturally, he has his gods, his halfgods, and his major detestations. The Bible and Flaubert were his companions throughout the many years he voyaged in strange, southern seas. From the Bible he absorbed his racy, idiomatic, and diapasonic English; from the supple shining prose of the great French writer he learned the art of writing sentences, their comely shape, and vigorous, rhythmic gait, their colour, perfume; the passionate music of words and their hateful power. He also studied other masters. He is an admirer of Poe, Hawthorne, Walt Whitman, and Henry James among American writers.

ALMAYER'S FOLLY

A Story of an Eastern River.

THIS is a book a few people have already read with rapture: by-and-bye everybody will have read it, and then the world will know that a new great writer and a new and splendid region of romance have entered into our literature. I never heard the name of Joseph Conrad before, and I should never have heard of the book if it had not been for that ever-mindful friend of mine, Justin McCarthy, who knows everything, reads everything and is a critic of unerring judgment. When I got from Mr. Unwin a copy of "Almayer's Folly" it dawned upon me that I had seen the book before. But I had passed it by amid a heap of other books that cumbered my tables and importunately but vainly demanded notice. Justin McCarthy sent me back to the book once more. I opened it; I read the first page; I never willingly dropped the book for a second afterwards until, in a tumult of feeling with a sorrow as of a real and disastrous parting, I had just closed its last page. The world into which it introduced me I never knew before—I had scarcely even heard of; I certainly had not realized. It is that region which lies on the borderland of the possessions of the Dutch in Asia—a bit of the Malay Archipelago, which is still but a name to all who have not travelled in Asia, and to many who have. But under the magic of the writer of genius who has told its story—and he is a writer of genius—I learned almost the entire mystery and heart of this strange, far-off region. To the wearied reviewer—to any reader of novels—there is nothing so fascinating as the discovery of a new World, and this is what "Almayer's Folly" does for you. In addition there is a story of love and of despair—a father's love, a father's despair—as profoundly moving as any in the literature of the nineteenth century. Turgenieff has created "The Lear of the Steppes," Balzac the Lear of the Boulevards, "Pere Goriot." Almayer is the Lear of the Malay Archipelago.

"Almayer's Folly: A Story of an Eastern River"—this is the full title of the story. I give the title in full because the second branch of it is almost as important as the first. The

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river is the chorus of nature to the tragedy—is never absent, never insensible, never silent. It is the river of which you hear in the first page, and in almost every page to the last; and it is the melodious and striking picture of it, in which the story opens, that first lets you know the splendid power of the writer. The passage is an effective introduction of the river and the man :—

“ ‘Kaspar! Makan!’ The well-known shrill voice startled Almayer from his dream of splendid future into the unpleasant realities of the present hour. An unpleasant voice, too. He had heard it for many years, and with every year he liked it less. No matter; there would be an end to all this soon. He shuffled uneasily, but took no further notice of the call. Leaning with both his elbows on the balustrade of the verandah, he went on looking fixedly at the great river that flowed—indifferent and hurried—before his eyes. He liked to look at it about the time of sunset; perhaps because at that time the sinking sun would spread a glowing gold tinge on the waters of the Pantai, and Almayer’s thoughts were often busy with gold; gold he had failed to secure; gold the others had secured—dishonestly, of course—or gold he meant to secure yet, through his own honest exertions, for himself and Nina. He absorbed himself in his dream of wealth and power away from this coast where he had dwelt for so many years, forgetting the bitterness of toil and strife in the vision of a great and splendid reward. They would live in Europe, he and his daughter. They would be rich and respected. Nobody would think of her mixed blood in the presence of her great beauty and of his immense wealth. Witnessing her triumphs he would grow young again, he would forget the twenty-five years of heart-breaking struggle on this coast where he felt like a prisoner. All this was nearly within his reach. Let only Dain return! And return soon he must—in his own interest, for his own share. He was now more than a week late! Perhaps he would return to-night. Such were Almayer’s thoughts as, standing on the verandah of his new but already-decaying house—that last failure of his life—he looked on the broad river. There was no tinge of gold on it this evening, for it had been swollen by the rains, and rolled an angry and muddy flood under his inattentive eyes, carrying small drift-wood and big dead logs, and whole uprooted trees with branches and foliage amongst which the water swirled and roared angrily. One of those drifting trees grounded on the shelving shore, just by the house, and Almayer, neglecting his dream, watched it with languid interest. The tree swung slowly round, amid the hiss and foam of the water, and, soon getting free of the obstruction, began to move down stream again, rolling slowly over, raising upwards a long, denuded branch, like a hand lifted in mute appeal to heaven against the river’s brutal and unnecessary violence. Almayer’s interest in the fate of that tree increased rapidly. He leaned over to see if it would clear the low point below. It did; then he drew back, thinking that now its course was free down to the sea, and he envied the lot of that inanimate thing now growing small and indistinct in the deepening darkness. As he lost sight of it altogether he began to wonder how far out to sea it would drift. Would the current carry it north or south? South, probably, till it drifted in sight of Celebes, as far as Macassar, perhaps! ”

Almayer is a native of Java, the son of Dutch parents—of a “father who grumbled daily at the stupidity of native gar-

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deners"—and of a "mother" who, "from the depths of her long easy-chair, bewailed the lost glories of Amsterdam." Almayer had left his home "with a light heart and a lighter pocket, speaking English well, and strong in arithmetic; ready to conquer the world, never doubting that he would." And it was in pursuit of fortune that he allowed himself to be half-tricked, half-cajoled by Captain Lingard—the most dashing, and, by repute, the most opulent of the skipper-merchants of the Archipelago. This Captain Lingard has the mysterious charm of having "discovered a river"—it is the river of which we have already heard; and the river led—as people thought—to one of those great mines of gold and precious stones which used to be the Holy Grail of Malay dreams and avarice. Lingard has disappeared for many years when we meet Almayer. The Malay wife has relapsed to savagery—odious, filthy, degraded—hating and hated. And Almayer—a wondrously-drawn character—has failed in all his enterprises, has sunk deeper and deeper in poverty; but has still the obstinate hope of the impracticable dreamer—still believes in the mine of gold which Lingard has left him as a heritage and a curse; and, above all, believes in his daughter Nina, and in the great future he will make for her.

The dream of Almayer is to bring this beautiful girl back to Amsterdam—the cradle of her people—to make her so wealthy that people will forget the Malay stain; to have her rich, honoured, a leader in that white society which alone seems to him worthy of consideration.

And the tragedy is that Nina will have none of these things. It is the savage instincts of the mother, not the civilized longings of the father, that attract her. The white man had wounded her in her earliest years. She had been sent to Singapore to be trained in civilized ways and in the Christian creed; but she had been forcibly turned out of the white community and sent back to her father because a white man had preferred the splendour of her beauty to the paler charms of the pure white daughters of the household. Hence she can listen with interest, and even with greedy ears, to the hideous hag, her mother, even after that mother has poured forth all the vials of her unreason, vulgarity, and savagery on the gentle, tender, helpless dreamer who adores her—her father.

And so, these two people lived beside each other—each marking the other's nature, and the other's purposes; the father dreaming of the ambitions of a white man—Amsterdam, civilization, Europe, home; the daughter dreaming of the wild brave

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men, loving adventure, slaughter, and power, whose blood was in her veins.

The intruder came that was to bring all these conflicting elements into tragic collision—a young Malay prince in search of gain, adventure, and the lives of the white men—of the Dutch who had conquered and humiliated his race.

Nina and Dain Maroola—such is the name of the Malay chief—fall in love at once. In him Nina sees the satisfaction and perfection of all her dreams; while to the father he is simply a Malay—who may be useful in helping him to find the treasure of gold, but after that to be despised, looked down upon, stamped for ever with the insuperable inferiority of dark blood. The time is approaching when Almayer and Dain are to start together; and so full is the incurable dreamer of his hopes that he forgets all his wretched surroundings.

The story of love is now crossed by the perennial feud between the Malays and the Dutch white men. Dain has made war on the Dutch, has slain some of the sailors, and the Dutch sailors are in pursuit of him, with death as his portion, if caught. Though he knows that every hour is thus full of mortal peril, Dain's love for Nina is so strong that he cannot leave. Nina, her mother, and he make a plot to save him—one part of which is that the dead body of one of his servants, who has been drowned, shall pass for his. Most people believe it—especially Almayer, who sees in the death of the man on whose help he had staked the last cast of his die the destruction of his final hopes, the fitting ending of his futile dreams.

I must rush rapidly towards the great scenes in which the story culminates. Nina leaves her father, and follows her lover to the shelter in which he has taken refuge—to be his for evermore. They meet—Nina and Dain—after some risks.

The final scene of parting between the father and the daughter is so touching, intense, and, I may even say, awful, that it is impossible to read it without a tightness at the heart.

“Now she was gone his business was to forget, and he had a strange notion that it should be done systematically and in order. To Ali's great dismay he fell on his hands and knees, and, creeping along the sand, erased carefully with his hand all traces of Nina's footsteps. He piled up small heaps of sand, leaving behind him a line of miniature graves right down to the water. After burying the last slight imprint of Nina's slipper he stood up, and, turning his face towards the headland where he had last seen the prau, he made an effort to shout out loud again his firm resolve to never forgive. Ali, watching him uneasily, saw only his lips move, but heard no sound. He brought his foot down with a stamp. He was a firm man—firm as a rock. Let her go. He never had a daughter. He would forget. He was forgetting already. Ali approached him again, insisting

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on immediate departure, and this time he consented, and they went together towards their canoe, Almayer leading. For all his firmness he looked very dejected and feeble as he dragged his feet slowly through the sand on the beach; and by his side—invisible to Ali—stalked that particular fiend whose mission it is to jog the memories of men, lest they should forget the meaning of life. He whispered into Almayer's ear a childish prattle of many years ago. Almayer, his head bent on one side, seemed to listen to his invisible companion, but his face was like the face of a man that has died struck from behind—a face from which all feelings and all expression are suddenly wiped off by the hand of unexpected death."

Isn't that an awful picture? And look at that little detail—"He erased carefully with his hand all traces of Nina's footsteps. He piled up small heaps of sand, *leaving behind him a line of miniature graves right down to the water.*" It is only a writer of genius who could write that and many another passage in this startling, unique, splendid book.

"T.P." in "*The Weekly Sun*," June 9, 1895.

AN OUTCAST OF THE ISLANDS

LAST year there was published an East Indian romance, "Almayer's Folly," which was praised, it is to be feared, rather more than it was read. Reviewer after reviewer hailed the new writer more or less pithily, promised him a brilliant future, and thought no more of the matter. "Mr. Conrad," said the "Daily Chronicle," thumbs up, so to speak. "Mr. Conrad may go on." "We have been struck by the book." "He will find his public, and he deserves his place." And Mr. Conrad has availed himself of this generous permission, and has gone on—to a remarkably fine romance indeed. One fault it has, and a glaring fault; and that one may deal with first, and put aside to proceed to the more grateful enterprise of praise. Mr. Conrad is wordy; his story is not so much told as seen intermittently through a haze of sentences. His style is like river-mist; for a space things are seen clearly, and then comes a great grey bank of printed matter, page on page, creeping round the reader, swallowing him up. You stumble, you protest, you blunder on, for the drama you saw so cursorily has hold of you; you cannot escape until you have seen it out. You read fast, you run and jump, only to bring yourself to the knees in such mud as will presently be quoted. Then suddenly things loom up again, and in a moment become real, intense, swift.

Now all this is set down without any desire of detraction. It is the least any one must say who is setting out to give Mr. Conrad his meed of praise as a romancer. After all this has been said, one can still apply superlatives to the work with a conscience void of offence. Subject to the qualifications thus disposed of, "An Outcast of the Islands" is, perhaps, the finest piece of fiction that has been published this year, as "Almayer's Folly" was one of the finest that was published in 1895. It is hard to understand how the respectable young gentlemen from the Universities who are engaged in cutting out cheaper imitations of the work of Mr. Stanley Weyman and Mr. Anthony Hope can read a book like this and continue in that industry. Think of the respectable young gentleman from the University, arrayed in his sister's hat, fichu, rationals, and cycling gauntlets, flourishing her hat-pin, and pretending, in deference to the

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supposed requirements of Mr. Mudie's public, to be the deuce and all of a taverning mediæval blade, and compare him with Willems the Outcast, late confidential clerk to Hudig & Co. Here you have (a little pruned of words) the picture of Willems in his glory:—

"In the afternoon he expanded his theory of success over the little tables, dipping now and then his moustaches in the crushed ice of the cocktails; in the evening he would hold forth, cue in hand, to a younger listener, across the billiard-table. *The billiard balls stood still as if listening also*, under the vivid brilliance of the shaded lamps. . . . Through the big windows the salt dampness of the sea, the vague smell of mould and flowers, drifted in and mingled with the odour of lamp-oil. . . . Willems would win the game, he would say a patronizing 'Good night,' and step out into the long empty street. He would walk in the middle, his shadow gliding obsequiously before him. He looked down on it complacently. The shadow of a successful man! He would be slightly dizzy with cocktails and his own glory. . . . As he often told people, he came East fourteen years ago, a cabin-boy. A small boy. His shadow must have been very small at that time. . . . And now he was looking at the shadow of the confidential clerk of Hudig & Co. going home. . . . He had not done himself justice out there; he had not talked enough, not impressed his hearers enough. Never mind. Some other time. Now he would go home and make his wife get up and listen to him. . . . A man of his stamp could carry off anything, do anything, aspire to anything. In another five years those white people who attended the Sunday card-parties of the Governor would accept him—half-caste wife and all! Hooray! He saw his shadow dart forward and wave a hat, as big as a rum-barrel, at the end of an arm several yards long. . . . Who shouted hooray? . . . He smiled shamefacedly to himself, and, pushing his hands deep into his pockets, walked faster with a suddenly grave face."

How that reeling swaggerer lives! And the strange thing is that Willems lives through 383 pages, and dies living, shot by his savage mistress in a flash of jealousy:—

"Something stopped him short, and he stood aspiring the acrid smell of the blue smoke that wheeled about him. . . . Missed, by Heaven! Thought so! And he saw her very far off; while the revolver, very small, lay on the ground between them! . . . Missed! . . . He would go and pick it up now. Never before did he understand as in that second the joy, the triumphant delight, of sunshine and of life. His mouth was full of something salt and warm. He tried to cough; spat out. . . . Who shrieks? He dies! Who dies? Must pick up . . . Night! What? . . . Night already!"

Then compare Mr. Conrad's wonderful Aïssa with the various combinations of Mr. Hope's "Duchess" and Mr. Weyman's fitful lady that do duty in contemporary romance. How she lives and breathes through all this jungle of tawdry pretentious verbiage!

"He hurried on, driven by a suddenly awakened curiosity, and entered the narrow way between the bushes. At the next turn of the path he

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caught again the glimpse of coloured stuff and of a woman's black hair in front of him. He hastened his pace, and came in full view of the object of his pursuit. The woman, who was carrying two bamboo vessels full of water, heard his footsteps, stopped, and, putting the bamboos down, half turned to look back. Willems also stood still for a minute, then walked steadily on with a firm tread, while the woman moved aside to let him pass. He kept his eyes fixed straight before him; yet almost unconsciously he took in every detail of the tall and graceful figure. As he approached her the woman tossed her head slightly back, and, with a free gesture of her strong round arm, caught up the mass of loose black hair, and brought it over her shoulder and across the lower part of her face. The next moment he was passing her close, walking rigidly, like a man in a trance. He heard her rapid breathing, and he felt the touch of a look darted at him from half-open eyes. It touched his brain and his heart together. It seemed to him to be something loud and stirring like a shout, silent and penetrating like an inspiration. The momentum of his motion carried him past her; but an invisible force, made up of surprise and curiosity and desire, spun him round as soon as he had passed.

"She had taken up her burden already, with the intention of pursuing her path. His sudden movement arrested her at the first step, and again she stood straight, slim, expectant, with a readiness to dart away suggested in the light immobility of her pose. High above, the branches of the trees met in a transparent shimmer or waving green mist, through which the rain of yellow rays descended upon her head, streamed in glints down her black tresses, shone with the changing glow of liquid metal on her face, and lost itself in vanishing sparks in the sombre depths of her eyes that, wide open now, with enlarged pupils, looked steadily at the man in her path. And Willems stared at her, charmed with a charm that carries with it a sense of irreparable loss, tingling with that feeling that begins like a caress and ends in a blow, in that sudden hurt of a new emotion making its way into a human heart, with the brusque stirring of sleeping sensation awakening suddenly to the rush of new hopes, new fears, new desires—and to the flight of one's old self."

Surely this is the real romance—the romance that is real! Space forbids anything but the merest recapitulation of the other living realities of Mr. Conrad's invention—of Lingard, of the inimitable Almayer, the one-eyed Babalatchi, the Naturalist, of the pious Abdulla—all novel, all authentic. Enough has been written to show Mr. Conrad's quality. He imagines his scenes and their sequence like a master, he knows his individualities to their hearts, he has a new and wonderful field in this East Indian novel of his—and he writes despicably. He writes so as to mask and dishonour the greatness that is in him. Greatness is deliberately written; the present writer has read and re-read his two books, and, after putting this review aside for some days to consider the discretion of it, the word still stands. Only greatness could make books of which the detailed workmanship was so copiously bad, so well worth reading, so convincing, and so stimulating.

"The Saturday Review," May 16, 1896.

TALES OF UNREST

MR. CONRAD shows himself here of the school of the Decadents, and reminds us of Huysmans. He has the same detailed vision of the external world and of the internal world of thought and emotion, the same leaning out to a transcendental world beyond our ken—though in him this has not led to the acceptance of any definite mystical system—the same preciousness of style. Like Maeterlinck he can interpret our silences as more eloquent than our words. And like the Decadents generally he sacrifices the whole to the part: so that in spite of the charm of his analysis, there rises in us sometimes an impatience for the gist of the matter, the story to be told, from which, after all, we can learn most. It comes in due time, and is well told when it comes.

We must take two of these tales, one in which external, and one in which internal, vision plays the chief part, and examine them more closely.

“Karain” is the story of a Malay chief, lord of a half-moon of land between a bay and the encircling hills, on some island in the Eastern Archipelago. Here is a description of the bay:—

“The bay was like a bottomless pit of intense light. The circular sheet of water reflected a luminous sky, and the shores enclosing it made an opaque ring of earth floating in an emptiness of transparent blue. The hills, purple and arid, stood out heavily on the sky; their summits seemed to fade as into a coloured tremble of ascending vapour; their steep sides were streaked with the green of narrow ravines; at their foot lay rice-fields, plantain patches, yellow sands. A torrent wound about like a dropped thread. Clumps of fruit trees marked the villages; slim palms put their nodding heads together above the low houses; dried palm-leaf roofs shone afar, like roofs of gold, behind the dark colonnades of tree-trunks; figures passed vivid and vanishing; the smoke of fires stood upright above the masses of flowering bushes; bamboo fences glittered, running away in broken lines between the fields. A sudden cry on the shore sounded plaintively in the distance, and ceased abruptly, as if stifled in the downpour of sunshine; a puff of breeze made a flash of darkness on the smooth water, touched our faces and became forgotten. Nothing moved. The sun blazed down into a shadowless hollow of colours and stillness.”

In the second tale which we select, “The Return,” Alvan Hervey, a young Englishman of health and wealth, with the

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usual ideals of material success and social ambition, and the usual hidebound conventionalism of temperament of his class, returns home from the City, to find his wife absent, and a note from her to him on her dressing table. She had been apparently a fit mate for him.

"They understood each other warily, tacitly, like a pair of cautious conspirators in a profitable plot: because they were both unable to look at a fact, a sentiment, a principle or a belief, otherwise than in the light of their own dignity, of their own glorification, of their own advantage. They skimmed over the surface of life hand in hand, in a pure and frosty atmosphere, like two skilful skaters cutting figures on thick ice for the admiration of the beholders, and disdainfully ignoring the hidden stream, the stream restless and dark; the stream of life, profound and unfrozen."

Now he learns from the note that his wife has left him to fly to the arms of a society journalist. But in the midst of the shock thus occasioned him, she re-enters the house and confronts him shamelessly, having changed her mind, not from moral compunction, but because she could not finally consent to cast herself adrift from the life which had become her second nature. After a painful scene, in which the husband seeks to re-establish their marriage upon the foundation of sacred social principles, to the ignoring of elemental facts, while the wife preserves a bored muteness that ends in hysterics, the pair decide, at last, to make their usual evening appearance at the solemn function of dinner and converse with decorous hypocrisy before the servants. It is in describing all that passed in the man's mind during the crisis that Mr. Conrad excels himself. For he gives us not only his hero's words, not only the thoughts born and fully present in his consciousness, but those dim masses of thought, imagination and emotion, which at times of spiritual shock and stress throng upon the threshold of consciousness, and crowd the mind with the rapidly changing phantasmagoria, suggestions and terrors of dream. And we feel that he is wonderfully sure and accurate in the presentment.

"He said very distinctly and looking at the carpet, 'She's gone.' It was terrible, not the fact, but the words; the words charged with the shadowy might of a meaning that seemed to possess the tremendous power to call Fate down upon the earth, like those strange and appalling words that sometimes are heard in sleep. They vibrated round him in a metallic atmosphere, in a space that had the hardness of iron, and the resonance of a bell of bronze. Looking down between the toes of his boots he seemed to listen thoughtfully to the receding wave of sound; to the wave spreading out in a widening circle, embracing streets, roofs, church steeples, fields, and travelling away, widening endlessly."

It has been said that in *Othello* behind the external drama there is an internal drama, if anything, more profound and

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terrible—the drama of Othello's thoughts; and that such is the art of the poet, that by the least ejaculation of Othello he suggests to us seething seas of emotional thoughts. Our author reveals, in downright terms, these seething seas in the mind of the outraged Alvan Hervey. He is by no means so successful in the ejaculations he assigns to him. His fragments of speech are often unintelligible. The conclusion of the story is not very convincing. Alvan has a touch of grace, and perceives that a life without love, yet shamming it, will be a hollow hell and unendurable. He awakes to the potentiality in himself of true love, but concludes that his wife has not the gift. He rushes from the house and leaves her for ever. True grace might have suggested to him to give her half a chance. A frank confession on his own part of his previous incompleteness, and of his spiritual development by trial, might have cleared the situation and offered her the opportunity of response. And, in any case, there are wives whom we should love, as we love animals and children—not insisting on their moral perfection as condition of our love, but loving them as they please and interest us, humbly re-wooing them when we have offended them, as we re-woo pussy when we have trodden on her tail. Perhaps these are the best sort of wives. For what is more boring than a contest of idealism and self-sacrifice, in which nature and simple human affection have no part? He who retires from his married life, as he who commits suicide, is often one who rejects not only a life, but a means of spiritual development and practical growth in grace.

Besides the two tales, which we have referred to more particularly, there are others entitled respectively, *The Idiots*, *An Outpost of Progress*, *The Lagoon*. All will repay a leisurely perusal, in which alone their rich æsthetic quality can be appreciated.

“*The Literary Gazette*,” June 20, 1898.

THE ARROW OF GOLD

THE critics are busy with Mr. Joseph Conrad's new story—"The Arrow of Gold."

"What a wonderful thing is this Conrad prose, so flexible, so supple, so full of gradations, so capable of saying subtle things simply!" exclaims Mr. James Douglas in the *Star*. "It flows over the thought like a stream over a boulder, and it can become as turbulent or as tenuous as you please. How comes it to pass that this marvellous Pole can write English prose that is unequalled by any living English writer?"

"Well, 'The Arrow of Gold' is a masterpiece. Do not read it hastily, like a newspaper. Dream and idle over it. Taste its many flavours one by one. If you try to gulp it down it will annoy you and even bore you. And remember that it is a romantic comedy, not a bald, straight story. Rita is perhaps too literary to be taken quite seriously, but then she is a glamour, a wonder, a work of art. She is a woman who is 'all dressed up and nowhere to go.' Has she a 'sacred core'? Is she pure artifice? Is she a stage siren in Conrad trappings? I am suspicious. Would Conrad have called her Rita if he had not been bent upon a feat of acrid irony?"

"Cleopatra, La Vallière, Thaïs, Phyrné, Nell Gwynne—roll all the enchantresses into one and you get the mysterious heroine of Mr. Joseph Conrad's new romance," says Mr. Douglas. "Doña Rita is the fatal woman who tortures men. She is the huntress and the quarry. She is the bait that makes the taken mad. She is half-child and half-siren. She is the mystery of iniquity that tantalises and destroys. Now there is nothing new in the glamour of the lady without mercy. She is as old as the hills. The bare bones of Mr. Conrad's romance are bleached with age."

"If I were to lay them out in a row you would sniff at them disdainfully. But Mr. Conrad is a man of genius, and the old story in his hands is amazingly fresh, intolerably sardonic, unbearably ironical. Doña Rita is pitilessly drawn, with infinitely soft subtleties and sophistications. She is Cleopatra in love. Can Cleopatra love? There's the rub. Mr. Conrad cruelly declines to answer his own riddle."

THE ARROW OF GOLD

“Conrad is the supreme fatalist of romance, and his cold contempt for the bitter comedy of life surpasses that of any other novelist. He dresses up the comedy in rich and splendid garments. Life for him is not sweet; it is sour. Even the sardonic pessimism of Hardy is less opulently luxurious in its scorn and disdain. This giant of irony depicts men and women with a terrible compassion that is more implacable than the savage hatred of Swift. He does not stoop to any form of moral justification or condemnation of conduct. He takes life up and looks at it curiously and turns it into a decoration. He is the remote artist who cares for nothing but the line, the curve, the colour, and the rhythm of life. And he despises the mere bustle of action. Always it is the soul of mortals that he cares for, and not the mechanical unravelling of plot.”

“Passages abound exemplifying his sense of beauty, his intuition, his grasp of character, his supreme gift of realization,” says the *Times* critic. “But the colours and shadows of that mystery which veils and yet deepens the ultimate ‘meaning’ of his fiction seem in the progress, and certainly in the conclusion, of his story too thin, and to leave it in a vital degree fragmentarily and insecurely told. Possibly in so saying we ignore his own warning. ‘History has nothing to do with this tale. Neither is the moral justification or condemnation of character aimed at here. If anything it is perhaps a little sympathy that the writer expects for his buried youth.’”

“*Public Opinion*,” Aug. 15, 1919.

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